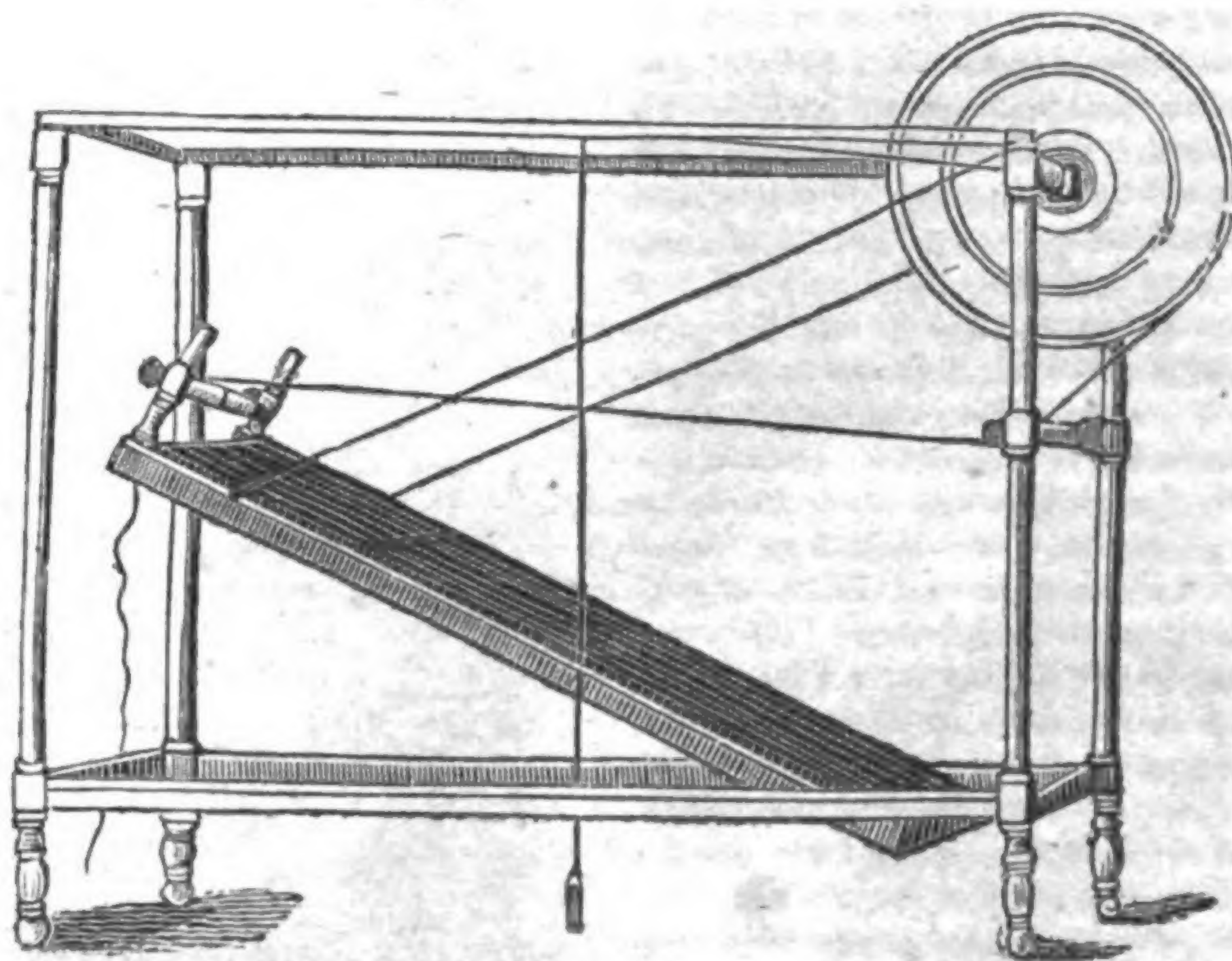


From Mrs. Hale's Magazine.



PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF WOMAN.

WE propose to offer a few remarks upon the physical education of woman—that culture of the corporeal powers, which alone can enable her to perform the duties of life with pleasure to herself and profit to others. That a vigorous exercise of mind depends upon a wholesome condition of the various organs of the human frame, we need not contend. Some rare instances are found where the intellectual power seems to gleam, like the consuming fire of the bird of fable, when matter is returning fast to its destined decay, but the whole history of our race affords proof, that well sustained mental vigour exists only in conjunction with good habits of diet and exercise, which give a healthy tone to all the functions of animal life. Not only the power, but the quiet and complacency of the mind, depend upon physical health. A great proportion of the fretfulness, irritability, and nervous excitement which render individuals, and sometimes families, wretched, arises from disease; and this disease is too often caused by habits, adopted and continued through ignorance or a perverse folly. If actions are wicked, as they are injurious, then are those females wicked, who disregard the dictates of nature, and persevere in practices which not only render themselves burthens upon society, but too frequently entail miseries upon others, for which, some day, they will be called to a severe repentance.

A very few of the prominent causes of vitiated animal powers are all that we can now mention. The first we shall advert to, is impropriety of dress. An important fact to be diligently considered, by those who have the charge of infants is, that the processes of breathing and digesting

are mainly assisted by, if not dependent on the vigorous action of muscles, lying upon the surface, as it were, on the body; and these are the two grand functions of organized life. In whatever way they are checked, life becomes less perfect, and the organization itself is speedily impaired, so that it cannot be restored. In fact, restoration is far less important than prevention, in a philosophical consideration of the subject.

To ensure free restoration and digestion, it is manifest that the great organs to which those duties are allotted should have the ability to carry on their several operations according to the economy of nature. The lungs and the stomach depend on the muscles which are spread over the chest, both before and behind, to assist their action. Those muscles must be in constant activity: if they are inoperative, the internal organs lose a part of their power to support the demands made upon them, in their several capacities. A long train of nervous, dyspeptic and other complaints follow the weakness of the stomach, and consumption is the terrific destroyer of these victims, in later generations, to weakness of the lungs. The first step, as must be apparent, to secure a vigorous condition of the growing frame, is to give full freedom to all those parts which assist the action of vital organs, and to encourage their development by appropriate exercises. All muscles may be made more powerful by judicious exertion; and those of the breast and shoulders, require it more than any others: they are the first to exhibit symptoms of weakness if neglected; and they are the most important. Look at a girl whose exercise is limited to an occasional promenade, or an occasional dance;

you will find her shoulders round, and her body stooping; or you will perceive that in the absence of all muscular ability to sit straight, fashionable dress has intervened to correct the deformity produced by idleness. The complaint is often heard, that females are weak without the support of dress. The fact is, they have taken from the frame its uniform action, and have transferred to articles of apparel, those duties which belong entirely to the muscles which God created for certain, well known, definite purposes. A female who cannot sit erect, and remain so with ease, without the assistance of artificial means, has so long trifled with her constitution, that muscle after muscle will yield; action after action will cease; the first indication of the coming evil is weakness of some particular part; the next is confirmed disorder of the digestive organs, or consumption.

By the fashion of modern times, the chest is encased in a species of apparel which forbids all motion of the muscles around it—the shoulders are kept in the same resolute position; the body can bend neither forward, nor backwards, nor sideways—the muscles are compressed tightly upon the bones—and this inaction and pressure produce absorption; for nature, as she creates nothing to be useless, so she refuses to support and nourish any thing whose use has been discarded. The muscles of any part, but particularly those of the body, weaken, when disturbed, and after the vital energy has begun to depart, a moderate degree of pressure will hasten their removal, till scarcely the vestige of a muscle is left. The vital actions depending in a great measure upon them, become feeble, and disease, deep seated, perhaps irradicable, may be discovered in every look and motion.

Ages of utter misery would be too little for the punishment of him who made the fashionable world believe that a small waist is essential to beauty. That belief introduced a mode of dress which the voice of ten thousand thunders would not repel. That dress absolutely prevents all useful exercise; and the victim of high life is practised upon by the mantua-maker, till she is deserted by her own vital power, and, having communicated disease to her offspring, and rendered all her friends uncomfortable by her constant ailings, repinings, and uselessness, she sinks to an untimely grave. We shudder while we write the melancholy truth; but we do not use the language of exaggeration. Our aim is to tell the plainest facts in the simplest language, being anxious to be intelligible rather than pleasing.

To prevent the evils and terrible diseases mentioned, these things are absolutely necessary:—1st. Freedom of motion from youth upwards, and most of all in that period of life when the animal organs are nearly developed and are about to take form, and consistency, as the growing process is suspended, that will render any change more difficult. 2d. Sufficiency of motion, which, by calling upon all the parts for their due proportion of assistance, will cause their due equality, and to aid or counterbalance each other, till ex-

quisite beauty will be displayed in symmetrical proportions, glowing complexion, and sparkling eyes. 3d. Well regulated diet: but this is foreign to the topics under immediate consideration.

How much of the uneasiness manifested by children, their restlessness, crying, and consequent sickness, is occasioned by improper restrictions of dress, no one can tell. That pain should follow a compression of the infantile organs, just labouring to attain a strong and correct action, is but a natural result; and without doubt, sickness and fits too often arise from the remote cause of improper management on the part of nurses, in regard to dress alone. Every part of the youthful frame should be unconstrained, but especially the chest—if compression must be resorted to, for elegance and fashion's sake, let it be the fashion to bind the hands and feet, and not the viscera on which life more immediately depends.

As the child continues to grow, the importance of varied and energetic exercise in development of the vital portion of our frame is altogether indescribable. If the arms and shoulders are suffered to remain idle, a contraction of the chest is the inevitable consequence—the shoulders approach each other in front, a constant pressure is exerted upon the lungs, and serious consequences ensue. This kind of evil is sometimes remedied by a back-board, which may draw the shoulders back, to be sure, but will only add to the coming misfortunes. The pressure of the board upon the back, and the manner in which it is confined, serve to injure the muscles of the back, so that, without external support, the body must bend forward, and, as it were, double up, compressing all vital organs, in a most dangerous manner. Let it be distinctly remembered that the body is kept upright, in a considerable measure, by the power of muscles of the back, which, in a healthy condition, are large and strong; and that any compression continued, tends to weaken, and may, if in a high degree, destroy them altogether. Stooping, therefore, is a symptom of weakness of muscles of the back. The common remedy is, a case formed in part of wood and whalebone, drawn on, tightly and stiffly round the chest, that not only stooping, but all other motions are impossible. The patient—for the moment artifice is required in support of the human frame, there is disease—the patient may be straightened out, but the consequences of taking the work of nature out of her own control are manifested by the pale countenance, the difficult respiration, the loathing appetite, the nervous irritability, the incapacity to arduous fatigue, the cough, the hectic, the consumption, and last of all, to close the history of thwarted nature, the early grave!

Consumption is sometimes caused by hereditary communication, but more often by inactive habits, and the consequent pressure which is adopted by all fashionables, to redeem the body from a bent posture; and it can be avoided in almost all cases by a careful adjustment of exercise and diet, giving fair play to all the parts.

Some consumptives are formed with contracted chests, a peculiar conformation, hereditarily derived, and the only course to save them from the destroyer, is to institute such habits in early life, as will tend to expand the box (if we may so say) in which the vital organs are deposited. Two things are needed in Boston, and, perhaps, every where else. One is a woman, who, with the spirit of Miss Wright, but in a holy cause, will learn to demonstrate the anatomy of the chest and abdomen, at least, to all females, that they may know, for themselves and for their offspring, more than they will believe without seeing and feeling, as did the incredulous apostle, who thrust his finger into the wounded side of the Redeemer. Men may write, but people will not read, or cannot understand; and there is obvious impropriety in anatomical lectures delivered by men to classes of females—but, if a properly educated woman, of strong mind and heart, would undertake such a task in behalf of her sex, she would deserve the appellation of apostle of usefulness to a misguided generation. The other needful thing is a system of calisthenic exercises in a proper place, with proper apparatus—and under a scientific and practical instructor. Our opinion is, that if people die of consumption, it is in most cases by foul play—either the person commits suicide, or is the victim of murderous management on the part of others.

Thus far we have noticed only indigestion and consumption; but there is another disease scarcely less formidable, and quite as fatal in its worst cases—we mean distortion of the spine.—The spine, or back-bone, as it is commonly called, is composed of a great number of small bones, bound together with surfaces nearly flat, between which is a soft substance, that operates at the same time to hold them fast, and to break any jar, which would produce serious effect upon a solid column. Now, these small bones, or vertebrae, are kept in their true longitudinal direction, in a great measure, by the muscles of the back; and it is by reason of those muscles that we keep the erect posture; and if they become weakened, either on one or both sides, the column is liable to deviate, either sideways or outwards, producing an elevation of one shoulder, so often seen, or a humped back, which is the most terrible and often the most fatal form of the disease. If a young girl's muscles have not been strengthened by exercise, and if she has a habit of lolling upon one side, or sleeping upon one side, the inevitable consequence is that the spinal column being bent and having nothing to restore it, it must remain in the wrong direction. After it has for a long time been accustomed to its unnatural situation, so that the surrounding parts have taken a corresponding condition, a cure is exceedingly difficult. In the first place, the column must be straightened, and the muscles of the short side extended; the ribs will then come to their true position, and by careful management, it is possible so to restore the vigor of the frame, that life will be rendered comfortable and prolonged in its beauty and grace.

We have already pointed out the means of prevention; it only remains to say a few words on the method of cure. And here we feel bound to say, that the gratitude of the whole community is due to Doctor Grigg, of this city, for his extensive and valuable researches in the mysteries of this subject. He has studied the apparatus and machinery of past times and of other countries, and has combined the best points of all in a species of bedstead, in which machinery is so arranged as to afford the desirable effect in restoring the true condition of the body.

Dr. Grigg's machine is represented in the cut at the head of this article, and it will be seen, that it applies an easy process of extension by means of the inclined plane, which divides, and separates; the lower portion sliding downwards, to extend the body, while the upper part, with the head and shoulders, retain their position. This extension may be increased or diminished by raising or lowering the bed of which the plane is formed; so that the patient may be perpendicularly suspended, or suffered to lie horizontally, or placed in any intermediate position, according to the severity of means required; and all this in the most convenient manner. Exercise is also introduced for the raising and lowering of the bed, which requires exertion on the part of the patient, it being accomplished by a cord passing over the wheel which is drawn by the hand. Friction is afterwards applied to excite the muscles, by the patient herself or a friend, as may be most suitable, and by perseverance a cure even of an obstinate case may be effected, while in all incipient stages of the disease it is speedy and certain. Many more things deserve notice in the construction of this elegant and useful apparatus, but it is sufficient to say, that one of our most distinguished surgeons has pronounced it the best of which he has any knowledge.

We trust that, while Dr. Grigg labors thus successfully to understand and overcome this "scourge of the fashionable world," the opportunity will not be disregarded to avail of his ability, by all who are sufferers in this case; and we shall be most happy if our remarks are so adapted to the want of the times, as to induce any persons to avoid, or to eradicate the disease of which we have spoken, before it be too late. The moment an inclination to one side is perceived, or that one shoulder or shoulder blade gains the predominance over the other, then is the time to apply the remedy, and to avoid pernicious habits.

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